

Message Text

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S E C R E T MANAGUA 0342

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: OVIP (TODMAN, TERENCE A.), PINT, NU
SUBJECT: ANALYTICAL UPDATE

REF: GUATEMALA 0378

SUMMARY: NICARAGUA IS APPROACHING CRITICAL POINT IN ITS POLITICAL HISTORY. THERE IS A CONCERTED EFFORT BY POLITICAL OPPOSITION AND PRIVATE SECTOR WITH POSSIBLE SUPPORT OF CATHOLIC CHURCH TO BRING PRESSURE TO BEAR ON SOMOZA. MANY OF THE OPPOSITIONISTS CONTINUE TO HOPE THE U.S. WILL TAKE AN ACTIVE, EVEN IF BEHIND THE SCENES, ROLE IN ENCOURAGING SOMOZA TO STEP ASIDE FOR A CONSTITUTIONAL

TRANSFER OF SOWER. SOMOZA APPEARS TO UNDERSTAND THE U.S. WILL NOT TAKE ANY STEPS TO REINFORCE HIS POSITION. SOMOZA IS LIKELY TO SURVIVE THE CRISIS IF HIS HEALTH HOLDS UP AND HE DOES NOT LOSE THE LOYALTY OF THE NATIONAL GUARD, ALTHOUGH HE MIGHT HAVE TO REIMPOSE MARTIAL LAW AND/OR REPRESSION TO DO SO.

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1. SOMOZA'S TRADITIONAL PILLARS OF SUPPORT HAVE LARGELY ERODED, WITH ONLY THE NATIONAL GUARD REMAINING. LIBERAL PARTY SOMOCISTAS CAN ALSO PROBABLY BE RALLIED BUT THERE IS SIGNIFICANT DISCONTENT EVEN AMONG CIVILIAN LIBERALS. GON HAS SUFFERED IN EYES OF NICARAGUANS OF ALL STRIPES DUE TO ASSASSINATION OF PEDRO JOAQUIN CHAMORRO AND ALMOST UNBELIEVABLY INCOMPETENT, CIRCUS-LIKE ATMOSPHERE OF INVESTIGATION OF THE MURDER. THERE IS ALSO GENERAL PUBLIC DISQUIET

CAUSED BY INCREASINGLY PROMINENT ROLE OF YOUNG MAJOR "TACHITO" SOMOZA BOTH RELATED TO HIS ALLEGED INVOLVEMENT IN QUESTIONABLE FINANCIAL DEALS AS WELL AS HIS INCREASINGLY POWERFUL POSITION AS DIRECTOR OF THE BASIC INFANTRY SCHOOL OF THE NATIONAL GUARD. (THUS FOLLOWING THE PATTERN SET BY HIS OWN FATHER.) HOWEVER, THE NATIONAL GUARD APPEARS TO CONTINUE TO REMAIN LOYAL TO SOMOZA AND IS ACTING PROFESSIONALLY.

2. THE HUGE DEMONSTRATIONS PURSUANT TO THE CHAMORRO ASSASSINATION HAVE RUN THEIR COURSE. HOWEVER, THE FOLLOW-ON NATIONAL STRIKE PROMOTED BY UDEL HAS THE SUPPORT OF MANY BUSINESSMEN AND INDUSTRIALISTS AND BY AFTERNOON OF JANUARY 24 HAS MADE A SIGNIFICANT START. A KEY REGIME ACTOR, LUIS PALLAIS DEBAYLE, STATES THAT THE STRIKE IS 50 PERCENT EFFECTIVE AS OF NOW.

3. SOMOZA INVITED THE LEADERS OF THE BUSINESS AND COMMERCE CHAMBERS TO MEET WITH HIM BUT THE COMMERCE CHAMBER PUBLICLY DECLINED IN LIGHT OF CURRENT CONDITIONS. THE CATHOLIC CHURCH HAS NOT TAKEN ANY OPEN ROLE IN THE PRESENT SITUATION, BUT IN LIGHT OF ITS INVOLVEMENT WITH THE NATIONAL DIALOGUE MOVEMENT, WHOSE MEMBERSHIP IS CLOSE TO THE NATIONAL STRIKE COMMITTEE, MAY BE PRESUMED TO BE TACITLY SUPPORTING THE ANTI-SOMOZA PRESSURE.

4. SOMOZA WITH GN BACKING CAN PROBABLY SURVIVE THIS CRISIS IF HIS HEALTH HOLDS UP BUT HE MAY HAVE TO RE-ESTABLISH MARTIAL LAW TO REASSERT HIS AUTHORITY, OR USE A HEAVY HAND IN DEALING WITH
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PROMOTERS AND SUPPORTERS OF THE WORK STOPPAGE.

5. THE LONG TERM CONSEQUENCES, IF SOMOZA SURVIVES THE CURRENT PRESSURE, WILL LIKELY BE HEIGHTENED POLARIZATION UNLESS, CONCESSIONS ARE MADE BY SOMOZA. GOVERNMENT INFLEXIBILITY COULD RESULT IN A GREATER ATTRACTION AMONG ALIENATED YOUTH TO THE FSLN GUERRILLAS AS THE ONLY ROUTE TO CHANGE.

6. SOMOZA'S CONTROL IS SHAKIER THAN WE BELIEVED IN THAT WE DID NOT EXPECT THE GENERAL STRIKE TO ACHIEVE SUCH EARLY MOMENTUM. PER PRIVATE CONVERSATION WE KNOW THAT SOMOZA EXPECTED TROUBLE BUT HE TOO MAY BE SURPRISED BY INTENSITY AND SPREAD OF ANTI-SOMOZA FEELING AMONG BUSINESS SECTOR.

7. WEIGHING AGAINST ASSISTANT SECRETARY'S VISIT AT THIS CRUCIAL TIME ARE FOLLOWING POINTS:

(A) BY HIS PRESENCE HERE ASSISTANT SECRETARY TODMAN WOULD BECOME THE FOCAL POINT FOR DEMONSTRATION AND INCREASED UNREST.

(B) TODMAN'S PRESENCE AT THIS POINT WOULD MAKE IT IMPOSSIBLE TO MAINTAIN U.S. ROLE AS NEUTRAL, SINCE ALL GROUPS WILL ATTEMPT TO USE

HIM BY PLACING ON HIM DEMANDS TO SUPPORT THEM AND REJECT THEIR OPPONENTS. HE COULD PROBABLY NOT SATISFY HIGH EXPECTATIONS OF ANY GROUP.

8. WE ARE INCLINED TO BELIEVE WHATEVER HAPPENS AS A RESULT OF THE CURRENT CRISIS, ONE SIDE OR THE OTHER IS LIKELY TO TRY TO CONVERT THE VISIT OF SUCH AN IMPORTANT OFFICIAL INTO AN EXCUSE FOR ITS FAILURE. OUR PREFERENCE IS THAT NICARAGUANS CONFRONT THE CURRENT SITUATION WITH LEAST POSSIBLE U.S. INVOLVEMENT SO THAT NICARAGUANS ARE LEFT TO CONCLUDE THEIR FATE IS IN THEIR OWN HANDS.

9. NET EFFECT OF CANCELLATION IS A DEMONSTRATION THAT SOMOZA'S POSITION IS WEAKENED AND AFFIRMATION THAT THE U.S. IS RELUCTANT TO BE PERCEIVED AS THE KEY ACTOR IN CURRENT POLITICAL CRISIS.

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10. THERE REMAINS, OF COURSE, THE ARGUMENT THAT A VISIT WHICH COULD BE SEEN AS TIPPING THE SCALES IN FAVOR OF ONE ELEMENT OR ANOTHER COULD BE IN U.S. INTEREST IN TERMS OF INFLUENCING THE POSSIBILITY FOR DEMOCRATIC CHANGE AND AVOIDING AN ESCALATING GUERRILLA INSURGENCY WHICH INVOLVES NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES. HOWEVER, EMBASSY BELIEVES SUCH AN INVOLVEMENT WOULD REQUIRE HIGHEST LEVEL DETAILED POLICY DECISION WHICH CANNOT BE ACCOMPLISHED UNDER PRESENT CONDITIONS.

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